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LAFAYETTE:

AN ORATION

BY

HON. CHARLES SUMNER,

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LA FAYETTE.

*An Oration, by Hon. Charles Sumner, delivered in New York and Philadelphia,
December, 1860.*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—I am to speak to you to-night of one who early consecrated himself to human freedom, and throughout a long life became its knight-errant, its hero, its apostle, its martyr—who strove for it as no man in all history ever strove—who suffered for it as few have suffered, and whose protracted career, beginning at a period when others are still at school, and ending only at the tomb, where he tardily descended, was conspicuous also for the purest principle, the most steadfast integrity, and the loftiest courage, civil and military. There is but one person in all history to whom this description is applicable, and even if your distinguished Chairman to-night had not announced my subject, you would all have anticipated me when I pronounced the name of La Fayette. Surely if liberty be what history, philosophy, and human art all declare, then must we revere the example of one who loved, but always with reverent fondness. Nor must we expect from his perfections that which does not belong to humanity. Surely it is enough for your gratitude that he stood forth a constant friend, unmoved, unshaken, un-reduced, un-terrified, trampling on all the blandishments of youth, of fortune, and of power; keeping himself sternly aloof, alike from king and emperor; giving himself singly to this great cause, with a soul as fearless, irreproachable as Bayard, from whom generals and kings received knighthood; as unbending as Cato, who alone stood against Cæsar; as gentle as the best loved disciple, who leaned on the bosom of the Saviour, and alone of all the disciples followed him to the cross! If this subject needed any attraction, I should find it in circumstances which it has been my lot to enjoy. Often while in Paris as an invalid I turned aside from its crowded life in order to visit the simple tomb of La Fayette, where he lies in the cemetery, just within the old walls of Paris, by the side of his heroic wife; and never did I look on that simple slab of red freestone—for that is all—and study the simple inscription, with-

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1868, Nov. 24.

Gift of

Mrs. Sarah A. Andorge,

of Chicago.

LA FAYETTE.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—I am to speak to you to-night of one who early consecrated himself to human freedom, and throughout a long life became its knight-errant, its hero, its apostle, its martyr—who strove for it as no man in all history ever strove—who suffered for it as few have suffered, and whose protracted career, beginning at a period when others are still at school, and ending only at the tomb, where he tardily descended, was conspicuous also for the purest principle, the most steadfast integrity, and the loftiest courage, civil and military. There is but one person in all history to whom this description is applicable, and even if your distinguished Chairman to-night had not announced my subject, you would all have anticipated me when I pronounced the name of La Fayette. Surely if liberty be what history, philosophy, and human art all declare, then must we revere the example of one who loved, but always with reverent fondness. Nor must we expect from his perfections that which does not belong to humanity. Surely it is enough for your gratitude that he stood forth a constant friend, unmoved, unshaken, un-reduced, un-terrified, trampling on all the blandishments of youth, of fortune, and of power; keeping himself sternly aloof, alike from king and emperor; giving himself singly to this great cause, with a soul as fearless, ir-reproachable as Bayard, from whom generals and kings received knighthood; as unbending as Cato, who alone stood against Cæsar; as gentle as the best loved disciple, who leaned on the bosom of the Saviour, and alone of all the disciples followed him to the cross! If this subject needed any attraction, I should find it in circumstances which it has been my lot to enjoy. Often while in Paris as an invalid I turned aside from its crowded life in order to visit the simple tomb of La Fayette, where he lies in the cemetery, just within the old walls of Paris, by the side of his heroic wife; and never did I look on that simple slab of red free-stone—for that is all—and study the simple inscription, with-

out title of any kind, and then turn to the surrounding monuments, all emblazoned with princely or noble titles, without confessing that practical loyalty of character, thus illustrated, which will be my theme to-night. And my impressions, gathered at the time, were confirmed at Lagrange, the country house of La Fayette, where he passed the last thirty years of his life in patriotic simplicity, surrounded by children, grandchildren, and happy guests, and where everything still bears witness to him. It was on a beautiful October day of the last year—now only a little more than a year ago—that just before leaving France, in company with a friend, I visited this most interesting scene. You all know something of it from books and pictures. It is a most venerable and picturesque castle, with five round towers, a moat, a draw-bridge, ivy-clad walls, a large court-yard within, and the whole embosomed in trees, except on one side, where a lawn spreads its verdure. Everything is historic. The castle in its origin goes back to the twelfth century. It was once tenanted by the princes of the great house of Lorraine. The cannon of the field-marshal of the time have left their traces on its masonry. The ivy which mantles so luxuriantly its gate and the tower by its side was planted by the great English statesman, Charles Fox, on his pilgrimage there during the short-lived peace of Amiens, in 1802. The park owes much of its beauty to La Fayette himself. The situation of the castle harmonizes with those retired habits which sought shelter here from the storms of fortune. It lies in a level district, forty-five miles due east from Paris, remote from any highway; remote, also, from the railway which now traverses that region, in a country filled with orchards, smiling with fertility of all kinds. The estate immediately about the castle contains six hundred acres, which, in the time of La Fayette, was increased by several outlying farms. A well-filled library occupies the upper room of one of the round towers, and in the window overlooking the farm-yard still stands the very desk at which La Fayette was in the habit of sitting, and within reach the speaking-trumpet with which he was in the habit of addressing his farmers from that very window, and on the desk the account-books of the farm, in his own handwriting, precisely as he left them. The castle is now tenanted by the family of one of his grandchildren, whose simple, cordial welcome to us, merely as Americans, gave token of their illustrious ancestor, no less than those many memorials or the full-length portrait which adorned the walls.

La Fayette, the only child of an ancient house, was born September 6, 1756. He came into the world an orphan, because his father had already perished at the battle of Minden. Those verses which once interested Burns and excited the youthful imagination of Scott:

Cold on Canadian hills or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain;
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops mingled with the milk it drew.

His mother died shortly afterward, leaving him alone in the world, without father, mother, brother, or sister, but with fortune and rank such as few possessed. In his own memoirs—which, of course, have been published only since his death—he speaks of his birth simply, and says nothing of his family. But if you would appreciate adequately the prejudices he overcame and the difficulties he encountered, you must know something of the family from which he sprang. That family was not merely ancient and noble, but historic. It had given to French history, in its earliest days, a Field Marshal, who, after valiant services in Italian campaigns, fought by the side of the Maid of Orleans, Joan of Arc, in the expulsion of the English from France; and Madame Sevigne, who shone at the Court of Louis XIV., and showed what woman could accomplish. So that the young orphan bore a name which, in a country of hereditary distinctions, bound him to their preservation, while it was to him everywhere an all-sufficient passport. But as some are born poets, and some mathematicians, so the Marquis de La Fayette was born to the career that he led—"Liberty." As he was accustomed often to repeat, "Liberty was with him a religion, a passion, a geometrical certainty," this passion—thus sacred, thus earnest, thus potent—was inborn, as was also a passion for glory. Even while still in the seclusion of his mountainous home, he sought for adventure. When at the early age of eleven he was transferred to the college at Paris, his soul thrilled under all instances of republican virtue. He delighted in his old age to remember that, while a boy at school, he lost the prize for a composition describing a perfect horse, because he could not resist the temptation of picturing the noble animal as throwing its rider at the sight of the whip. From youth to age he was silent and reserved, even to coldness, so that he differed from the giddy and ostentatious noblemen of the day in external manners as he differed from them in character.

An early marriage, at the age of sixteen, enlarged his aristocratic connections, and completed all that the heart could desire for happiness or worldly advancement. But the life of a courtier, and even the companionship of royal princes, did not satisfy his earnest nature. He turned away from the follies and splendor of Versailles, in order to follow in the footsteps of his father, as captain in the French army, stationed at Metz, a town upon the Rhenish frontier; and here there occurred an incident which gave character and direction to his whole subsequent life. The younger brother of King George III., smarting under the slights received at Court, on account of a marriage offensive to the King, suddenly left home, and going over to the Continent, stopped at Metz, where he was entertained at dinner by the commander of the garrison. At the table sat the youthful La Fayette, then scarcely nineteen years of age; and then for the first time he heard the story of the American insurgents—as your fathers were then called—of the conflicts at Lexington, Concord, at Bunker Hill, and of the Declaration of Independence. His whole soul was thrilled, and the words of the royal Duke fell upon his sensitive nature like a spark, kindling it to unaccustomed emotion; so that before that dinner was over, his resolve was fixed to cross the sea and offer his sword to distant unknown fellow-men struggling for human rights. This was in the autumn of 1776. Losing no time, he repaired to Paris, and at once presented himself before the American Commissioners there, who welcomed with grateful astonishment their romantically. Meanwhile came tidings of those disasters—too familiar to all of us—of the forces of Washington in their retreat through New Jersey, tracking the snow with bloody feet, seeming to denote that all was lost. The American Commissioners, at the head of whom was that man of wisdom, Benjamin Franklin, openly confessed that they could not counsel him to proceed with his purpose. But his undaunted temper was now quickened anew; and when told by the Commissioners that with their damaged credit they could not even provide a passage for him to our country, "Then," said he, "thus far you have seen my zeal only; it shall now be something more. I will purchase and equip a vessel myself. It is while danger threatens that I wish to join your fortunes." Noble words! Worthy of immortality, are they not! and never to be heard without a throb by the American heart. A vessel was found, and he went at his single and exclusive expense. Meanwhile, partly to mark his enterprise, and also in the

hardihood of his courage, he went over to England, where, owing to his eminence, although still so young, he was presented to George III. by the French Ambassador. The King received him with cordial hospitality, and invited him to prolong his visit, when La Fayette, in all simplicity, said it was impossible. The King followed up his invitation by inquiring, "Why can not you stay longer?" "May it please your Majesty," said La Fayette, in reply, "I have a very special engagement, which if your Majesty were aware of, your Majesty would not invite me to stay." Such was the welcome lavished upon him that he was even asked to be present at the review of British troops about to embark for America. But here his instinctive delicacy prevailed, and he declined, not thinking it right to take advantage of a hospitable invitation to inspect troops against whom he was so soon to array himself in war. "But," relating this incident in his old age, he said, "I met them six months afterward at Brandywine."

Leaving England, he traversed France with secrecy and dispatch, in order to join his vessel, which was lying at a Spanish port outside of French jurisdiction. His departure came like a bolt upon the English Court he had just left; and the French Court, unwilling to be perplexed at that moment by such a step taken by a Frenchman, planned for him a tour in Italy, which, in his long and busy life, he was unable to accomplish. His young wife was too noble in character and loved him too well not to sympathize with his purposes, although they caused his separation from her. To show the impression produced by his sudden departure, among the many illustrations that I could give, I will read three lines from a familiar letter written by Gibbon, the historian, dated London, April 12, 1777: "We talk chiefly of the Marquis de La Fayette, who was here a few weeks ago. He is about twenty, with 130,000 livres a year, and is gone to join the Americans." His own family, that into which he married, now interfered with peremptory command, and the government of France interfered by a well-known letter of *cachet*. Disregarding the one and evading the other, in the disguise of a courier, and, it is sometimes said, with his face painted black, he crossed the Pyrenees, and soon found himself on board his vessel with his few companions in arms.

On April 26, 1777, he set sail for America. Consider, if you please, the dangers of the sea which he then braved, and you will say, with the classic poet of antiquity, that he showed a heart of triple oak. Add to that the perils of capture, and add still more

the motive of all this enterprise, and your admiration must be enhanced. Never did hero go forth on a more beautiful errand, for it was he who carried words of cheer to our fathers and opened up a way to those fleets and armies of France afterward marshaled on our side; and its sympathy with our cause is most beautifully and tenderly revealed in the letters which he wrote to his wife on that passage. And as I am about to read a few lines from one of these letters, allow me to remark that I am not aware that they have ever been presented to attention in our country; they have naturally seen the light only since the death of La Fayette. I am not aware that they have been translated, nor do I know any source from which the character of La Fayette can be so completely illustrated. One other remark. I doubt if in all history, or in all biography, anything written by a youth of nineteen can be produced comparable to these words: "I hope, for my sake," thus he writes to his wife, "you will be a good American. This is a sentiment appropriate for virtuous hearts. Intimately allied to the happiness of the whole human family is that of America, destined to become the respected and sure asylum of virtue, honesty, toleration, and of tranquil liberty." What words for a youth of nineteen, laboring through the sea, but lifted up by thoughts like these!

He sailed at last, and touched the coast of South Carolina. Going ashore in the night and following a friendly light, he soon found himself beneath the roof of that country for which he had made such a sacrifice. The Continental Congress was then in session in Philadelphia, and his first desire was to report himself there. Keeping his own counsels, making no disclosures at Charleston of his plans, he started on a journey of nine hundred miles, most of the way on horseback, through the two Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. He journeyed on, enjoying nature in its simple freshness, and the kind, cordial welcome which greeted him everywhere on the road. "The farther North I proceed" (thus he writes in one of those tender and affectionate letters to which I refer, and to which I have before alluded), "the farther North I proceed, the more I like this country and its people." His attention had already been arrested by the "black domestics," as he called them, who came to receive his orders. Then, for the first time, he looked upon a slave, and his whole subsequent life shows clearly how his candid nature must have been troubled. He had turned away from France, where, amid gross inequalities of all kinds, this grossest did not exist; where, in the descending

scale of the feudal hierarchy, there was no place for this degradation; where, amid unjust taxes and injurious privileges of all sorts, every man had a right at least to his wife, his child, and to himself; and where the boast was proudly made and repeated by judicial tribunals, even as in England, that the air was too pure for a slave to breathe. With angelic generosity he had turned away from his own country to follow in the service of liberty, and now he found men rudely held as property and despoiled of personal rights by those whose struggles merely for political rights had already absorbed his soul. Youthful, and as yet little experienced in the inconsistencies of the world, his soul must have recoiled as this dismal and most incomprehensible inconsistency glared before him.

Arriving at Philadelphia, he presented himself at once before the Continental Congress, tendering his services as a volunteer and without pay. Congress, touched at once by the magnanimous devotion of the youthful stranger, and already, by a letter from Dr. Franklin, apprised of his eminent position at home, at once made him Major-General in the army of the United States, where he took rank by the side of Gates and Greene, of Lincoln and Knox. Born to exalted rank in an ancient monarchy, he now found himself admitted to the highest place in the military councils of a republic; and this while still a youth and under twenty—younger than Fox, younger than Pitt, when they astonished the world with their precocious parliamentary powers; younger than Goundeat, in his own beautiful France, on the field; and his modesty was not less eminent than his post. To Washington, who apologized for exhibiting his raw American troops before a French officer, he replied at once: "I have come here, sir, to learn, and not to teach." The Commander-in-Chief, usually so grave, was won at once to that perpetual friendship which endured unbroken as long as life; showing itself now in tears of grief and now in tears of joy—treating the youthful nobleman always with paternal care, sharing with him his table, his tent, and on the field of Monmouth the same cloak for a couch; following his transcendent fortunes, now on giddy heights and now in gloom, with constant, unalterable attachment; corresponding with him at all times, addressing his noble wife in her unparalleled affection, and pleading across sea and continent with the Austrian despot in his behalf. Surely it is much to have inspired the most tender friendship that history records in the life of Washington. There were other strangers about him scarcely less brilliant than La Fayette—Kos-

ciusko, Baron Steuben, the distinguished Commander-in-Chief of the French army, and others, gathered about Washington; but La Fayette alone obtained a place in his heart. Friendship is always a solace and a delight, but such a friendship was a testimony.

His intrepidity soon found occasion for display at the battle of Brandywine, where, in attempting to rally retreating troops, he was wounded in the leg; and thus, by suffering in our cause, increased his title to regard. As his simple, unaffected nature became known, he won the attachment of both officers and men—so that he was able to relieve the anxieties of his youthful wife at home by writing to her that he “possessed the friendship of the army in gross and in detail.” Those are his very words. Nor was this unnatural, when you consider how completely, in dress, in food, and in habits, he became American, as he was already American in sympathy. This youthful nobleman, bred to all kinds of luxury, subjected himself to privation and fatigue, and he showed himself more austere and frugal even than the republicans themselves, sometimes living for months on a single soldier's ration, without a dollar in his pocket. The confidence of Congress naturally followed, and by special vote Washington was instructed to give him a command of his own.

The scene now shifts. France, meanwhile, herself, has become openly enlisted on our side. One of her leading philosophers counseled against this step, which seemed to launch the ancient monarchy on a dangerous career. Jealous of a rival power, smarting under recent reverses, the French Court was willing to embarrass England, provided it could do so covertly, without the hazards of open war. The King himself never sympathized with our cause. This is an error in which many of us have been educated, that King Louis XVI. really sympathized with our fathers. It is a mistake; he did not; but public opinion, which, in that country, inclines to generous ideas, was touched by a distant people struggling for human rights, at first doubtful, and then suddenly illumined by the victory at Saratoga; while Franklin, who represented our cause in Paris, had challenged the admiration alike of the grave and the gay, and the example of La Fayette had touched the heart of the nation, so that the Court and the King were compelled to bend before the public will, and to enter into that treaty of alliance with the colonies by which their final success was assured.

The duties of the patriot were now superadded to those which La Fayette had already assumed to our cause, and he at once frankly

made known to Congress his new position, in a letter, from which I will read a brief passage: "As long as I thought," so he writes to Congress, "I could dispose of myself, I made it my pride and pleasure to fight under American colors, in defense of a cause which I dare call ours, because I had the good fortune to bleed for it. Now that France is involved in war, I owe her my services; but whether present or absent, I shall never fail in zeal for the United States."

Congress responded by an unlimited leave of absence, with permission to return to his original rank in his own good time, by a vote of thanks and by a letter to the French King, concluding with these emphatic words: "We recommend," says the American Congress, "this young nobleman to your Majesty's notice, as one whom we know to be wise in counsel, gallant in the field, and patient under the hardships of war."

It was while on his way to embark at Boston that he suddenly became ill of fever, and his life for a time was despaired of; and I mention it now merely to make a record of the grief that Washington showed. It is said that he read the language upon the daily bulletins of the physician with tears in his eyes. But the patient was happily spared to his family and to his two countries. If the sensation caused by his departure from France had been great, that caused by his return now, after two years of gallant service, with high military rank, with the thanks of Congress, the letter to the French King, and with the friendship of Washington, was far greater. Wherever he appeared, he was now greeted by an admiration that knew no bounds. He himself familiarly spoke of it—you may say in a French style. He says that he found all at once that he was consulted by all the Cabinet, and, what is much better, kissed by all the ladies. But his thoughts never were away from us, and he begrudged the expense of every *fête* given in his honor, wishing to see the money applied for the poorly-equipped American forces. So ardent was he, that the French Prime Minister said that La Fayette would, for the sake of Americans, strip the palace of Versailles of its furniture. Such a sincere and ardent nature, in one who was at the same time a French nobleman, was truly remarkable. The papers of La Fayette attest the ability with which he pressed upon his own government at home the duty of active participation in the contest. Soon he turned again from the charms of family and of country, and crossed the sea, and this time landed, not at South Carolina, but at Boston—a place for

which, in one of those tender letters to his wife to which I have referred, he says he always had a predilection (and you know this word has the same meaning in French as in English), chiefly, it appears, because there were no slaves there, but equality for all; although on one occasion he says that some people there in Boston seemed ill disposed. At the tidings of his arrival there was everywhere one outburst of welcome. The army were filled with delight, and Washington, so it is recorded, now shed tears of joy. Then commenced the second part of his American career with active military services; his campaign in Virginia against the British general, Lord Cornwallis, when the latter said, "The boy shall not escape me," followed up, however, by La Fayette's active co-operation in the final assault at Yorktown, when this very Lord Cornwallis surrendered to the combined forces of America and France.

All this belongs to the war of both countries, and I only allude to it, as my object to-night is to present to you only that which, if I may say so, constitutes the key-note to his life and character. Grim-visaged War now smoothed her wrinkled front, and in the lull which followed this great victory, La Fayette once more returned to France, with a new vote of thanks from Congress, and with new and higher trusts. By special vote, all our ambassadors in Europe were instructed to consult him, and the youthful soldier was now changed into the more youthful diplomatist. Nor was he less efficient in the new field. Wherever he appeared, his presence for our country was an embassy. Through him the haughty Spanish Court was approached, and gigantic forces were now gathered in the common cause at Cadiz, destined to attack the West Indies, then, sweeping along the coast, to capture New York, at that time the headquarters of the British power. Great Britain bent before the coming storm, and signed that treaty of peace by which our independence was acknowledged and our position in the family of nations secured.

It was fit that this great news should reach America first through her greatest benefactor. It was first known by letter to the Continental Congress from La Fayette, dated at Cadiz, 5th February, 1783, and I pray you do not forget that date, for I shall refer to it again. So that he who espoused our cause in the hour of its greatest gloom, became the herald of its final triumph.

But another letter, dated at Cadiz, 5th of February, 1783, bearing the same date with that announcing the acknowledgment of

our independence, opens another question which had already touched his heart, and opens a new chapter of glory. Thus he writes to Washington, and the coincidence of dates shows how clearly he associated the rights of the African slave with American independence. "Now, my dear General," says he, "since you are about to taste repose, permit me to propose a plan which may become largely useful to the colored portion of the human race. Let us join in the purchase of a small property, where we can make an experiment of emancipating the negroes, and of employing them simply as farm laborers. Such an example given by you would be generally followed; and if we should succeed in America, I would with joy consecrate a part of my time to extend it in the West Indies. This may seem a strange project; but I prefer for this cause to be called foolish, rather than by opposite conduct to be called wise."

Surely you are right to applaud those words. In them you can not fail to recognize that same lofty spirit that first led him to enlist for us; the same self-sacrifice, the same generosity, the same nobleness expressed with beautiful simplicity and frankness. France has heard those words for the African race. They are also precious as an illustration of that remarkable character which, from the beginning, was moved by no transient impulses of mere adventure, but by an instinct of human rights almost divine. In this light his consecration to our cause assumes new dignity, and American independence itself becomes but a stage in the triumphs of that liberty which is the common birthright of all mankind.

He was now in France, but adhering to a pressing invitation, he once more visited the land whose independence he had helped to secure by services in diplomacy and war. For six months a welcome guest, he surrendered himself to the sympathies of the people, the delights of friendship, and the companionship of Washington, whom he visited at Mount Vernon, and with whom he journeyed. But this was not all. The slavery of the African race had already touched his heart, and he could not be silent. In official answers to official addresses, from Southern Legislatures, he openly called upon them to commence the work of abolition. This was in 1784, several years before Clarkson, then a youth at the university, had been inspired to write that essay against slavery which was the beginning of his life-long career, and several years before Wilberforce, in the British Parliament, had brought forward that motion against the slave-trade which has made his name sacred in history.

If these words of La Fayette failed, at the time, of their purpose, they none the less exhibited the exalted character of their author.

At last, about to leave our country, and being received by Congress, as he was taking leave he let drop other words wherein may be seen the same spirit, and also the mighty shadow of the future. "May this great temple" (thus he closed his address to Congress in 1784), "which we have just elevated to liberty, always be a lesson to oppression, an example to the oppressed, a refuge for the rights of the human race, and an object of delight to the departed souls of its founders." Naturally words like these from a French nobleman show that a great revolution was at hand.

Once again in Europe, he ranged over its different countries, visiting its courts, and was everywhere a welcome guest, especially in Prussia, where he enjoyed the conversation of the philosopher King Frederick, sometimes called the Great, and the dazzling reviews of his well-ordered troops. But his heart was ever intent on human improvement, and hastening back to Paris, he at once commenced new and kindred services. He espoused the cause of the Protestants, and brought forward earnest measures for the removal of their disabilities, then amounting to absolute outlawry—the sad heritage of the Edict of Nantes—so that, although a Catholic himself, he is enrolled among the champions of religious toleration.

At this time his opposition to African slavery assumed a practical form. At an expense of 130,000 francs (which, allowing for the difference in the value then and now, would be about \$50,000) he purchased a plantation in the colony of Cayenne, in South America, with a view of emancipating negroes, and trying the great experiment of free labor. This was no hasty plan. You have already seen that more than two years before he sought to enlist Washington in that behalf. And now, I certainly should do injustice to both La Fayette and Washington, if I kept back the letter with which Washington received the intelligence of this last act:

"The goodness of your heart, my dear Marquis, is self-evident in all circumstances, and I am not surprised when you give new proofs of it. Your late acquisition of a plantation in Cayenne, in order to emancipate slaves, is a generous and noble proof of your humanity. May it please God that a similar spirit should animate all the people of this country."

Thus wrote Washington. That great event was now at hand

which, beginning in a claim of rights denied, and inspired by generous ideas, was destined, amid falling privileges and tottering thrones, to let loose the most direful furies of discord and civil war, to drench the scaffold with the blood of king, queen, and of good men in all ranks of life; to lift the nation to unknown heights of audacity and power, to dash back the host of foreign invasion like the angry surge from the rock, and organize victories on a scale of grandeur such as had never before been witnessed, and, finally, to mark an epoch in the history of the human race. The French Revolution was at hand. It was foreshadowed in the writings of philosophers, in the gradual march of human progress, in the widespread acceptance of our American Revolution, in the growing instincts of the people, in the obvious injustice of existing things. It was foreshadowed in the example of La Fayette. He was, of all men, its natural representative just so long as it continued moderate and humane. Alas! that a cause so just in itself, so precious in its objects, should be wrested from its true character by the passions of men. The first step was the Assembly of the Notables, in February, 1787. There stood in that assembly the two brothers of the King, all the princes of the blood, the dukes, peers, chancellors, and officials, all convened in the interests of the Crown. But the people had no representative. La Fayette became their representative. As he had formerly drawn the sword, so now he lifted his voice for popular rights. The King's brother—afterward Charles X.—feeling that La Fayette was pressing too far, undertook to call him to order. "We are summoned," said La Fayette, "to make the truth known to the King, and I shall proceed. He proceeded by formal propositions to call forth—1. The removal of the Protestant disabilities. 2. The abolition of certain unjust taxes. 3. The abolition of the whole system of arrests, especially the odious *lettres de cachet*. 4. The revision of the criminal law. 5. Economy in the royal household, pensions, and the administration of the government. Following these propositions, he proceeded to make a motion. That word, now so familiar to our ears, was then, for the first time, made in parliamentary proceedings in France. He made a motion to convene an assembly that should represent the people. "What!" said the King's brother, who was in the chair, "do you call for the States-General?" "Yes," said La Fayette, "and something better still." The States-General were called together in May, 1789, at Versailles. There appeared the imposing figure of Mirabeau, demanding, in the name of the

people, the removal of the troops placed by the King round about the Assembly. The youthful La Fayette rose to second the motion, followed by bringing forward a declaration of the rights of man, founded not on precedent or concession, but on immutable nature. Such declaration of rights, already known in our country, were now for the first time put forth in Europe. La Fayette's declaration began as follows:

"Nature has made men free and equal. Every man is born with rights inalienable and imprescriptible, such as the liberty of his opinions, the right of property, the uncontrolled disposal of his person, his industry, and all his faculties; the communication of all his thoughts by all possible means, the pursuit of happiness, and the resistance of oppression."

Those words, adopted by the National Assembly of France, were more than a battle—they were a victory, whose influences can never die. Only three days afterward the Bastille was leveled to the ground. People now looked for a leader, and they found him in the author of the Declaration of Rights. Amid an outburst of applause, La Fayette was conducted to the City Hall, placed at the head of the militia, which then, at his suggestion, took the name of the National Guard. It now became his duty to maintain order, and never was that service more conscientiously performed. The colors of Paris were blue and red, and in the spirit of conciliation he proposed to add the ancient color of France, white. Thus was formed the famous tri-color, which he then proudly declared was destined to make the tour of the world. But, though engrossed by his duties as commander of the Guard, he did not abandon his post in the National Assembly, and whenever he appeared there it was to utter some sentiment of liberty or sustain some principle. Borrowing a sentiment from the State of Virginia, he openly declared that "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God." He then, by way of practical proposition, called for trial by jury, the removal of religious disabilities, the equality of sects, the rights of colored persons in the colonies, the removal of all privileges, and, finally, the abolition of the nobility itself. While the latter proposition was pending, in reply to one who asked what they would substitute for those words, if the nobility were abolished—"noble for having saved the state at a particular day"—he simply said that on the day named the person in question had saved the state. The proposition prevailed, and ever afterward La Fayette laid down his own time-honored titles, and was known only as La Fayette. In

other respects he showed the same simplicity and sincerity of character. Accepting the honorary command of the National Guard, he received colored men in the uniform of the National Guard at his own dinner-table, where Clarkson, the philanthropist, relates that he met them, in 1790.

Beyond all question, he was now the most exalted citizen of France, the center of all, holding in his hands the destinies alike of King and people. Never in France had such eminence been obtained—never anywhere more honestly worn—never had it been surrounded by dangers so appalling. Perils and temptations of all kinds awaited him. But he was indifferent alike to temptation and to danger. Emoluments of all kinds he rejected. Had his been a vulgar ambition, he might have clutched at dominion and played the part of Cæsar, or Cromwell, or Napoleon. But true to the example of Washington, and above all true to himself and those just sentiments which constituted a part of his character, he thought only of the good of all. Calmly looking down on the fearful chaos, where ancient landmarks were heaving in confused mass, he sought only to assuage the wide-spread tumult, and to establish that divine tranquillity which, like the repose of nature, is found only in harmony with law, that human rights, always sacred, might derive new support from the prevailing order; and this done, it was his intention to withdraw into the seclusion of private life. The constitution, with his Declaration of Rights, was at length adopted. The King took his oath to support it, and La Fayette next did the same. The people by voice and outstretched hand united in the oath! How faithfully he kept that oath! At length, satisfied that the revolution had accomplished its work, he caused an amnesty to be proclaimed, and then laid down his great military power and withdrew to private life. But only for a short time.

The scene again changes. The two brothers of the King were now gathering hostile forces on the Rhenish frontier of France; Prussia and Austria had joined in the coalition. France was menaced. The government launched at once three armies against the invaders. At the head and center of the army was placed La Fayette, who for that purpose was summoned from his retirement. At the mention of his name in the National Assembly there was an outburst of applause; and when he received his instructions from the door, the President, addressing him, said: "France opposes to her enemies the constitution and La Fayette." Alas! how

soon were both to fall! A new power was beginning to show itself. Danton and Robespierre were active, clubs were organizing, the people were lashed to lawless frenzy, the Jacobins, whose name has ever since been the synonym for "counselors of sedition," became demented, and La Fayette, who had been the glory of the representatives of the Revolution, revolted at its excesses. In addressing a letter to the National Assembly, he denounced the Jacobins as substituting license for liberty. He gallantly appeared at the bar of the Assembly and repeated the denunciation. But the Reign of Terror was at hand, destined to fill France with darkness, and to send a shudder through the world. The King, Queen, and Royal Family, after a bloody conflict at the gates of the palace, were compelled to find shelter in the bosom of the Assembly. The scaffold was not yet quite ready, but the constitution was overturned, and with it La Fayette. True to his oath and to his own lofty integrity of character, he denounced the audacious crime.

The Jacobins had marked him, while yet at the head of the army, as their victim. Unwilling to save his own life at the expense of a civil contest that should drench France in fraternal blood, he resolved—sad alternative!—to withdraw from his post, and passing into a neutral country, thence to come to the United States, where from a distance he might watch his own country desolated by civil war.

As his eminence had been without parallel, so was now his fall. Power, fortune, wife, family, country—all were now changed for a dungeon, where, for more than five years, amid unparalleled privations, he wore away life. But not in vain; for who can listen to the story of his captivity without admiration for that unconquerable firmness of principle by which he was sustained. He was seized on the frontier as he was endeavoring to reach Holland, recognized by the soldiers, and then commenced that catalogue of indignities under which his great soul seemed rather to rise than to bend. To his application for a passport he was answered by the jeer that he should have a passport to the scaffold. The King of Prussia, thinking to take advantage of his growing debility, suggested that his condition might be improved in return for information furnished against France. The heart of the exiled patriot was aroused at the idea that he could be tempted to furnish information against his country. "The King is impertinent," he simply said, in reply, and composed himself to the continued rigors

that awaited him. He was at first cast into prison and then carried on a cart to the fortress of Madgeburg, where for more than a year he was immured in a dark, subterranean dungeon. On the establishment of peace between Prussia and France he was handed over to the Austrian jailers, by whom he was transferred to the fortress of Olmutz, then little known, but from this incident now memorable in history. His captivity was now complete. Alone in his cell, with no object in view but four walls, shut out from all knowledge of the world, shut out from all knowledge of his family, who, on their part, could know nothing of him; never addressed by his name; mentioned only by the number of his cell, 15; cut off from all chance of self-destruction, by being deprived of the use of a knife and fork—such was now his lot. But never for one moment did his soul bend in its firm resolves. Immediately on going to prison, he took the precaution to make an official declaration of his principles, so that he might not, in any respect, be confounded with fugitive royalists. Letters now exist, some of them written at the peril of his life—sometimes with lemon-juice, sometimes with a tooth-pick dipped in chimney-black mixed with vinegar—where his beautiful soul is laid bare. Confirming his joy that he suffers of that despotism which he had combated, rather than from the people he loved so well, he announces his equal opposition to the committees of Jacobinism and the cabinets of the coalition. He declares his firm conviction that amid all the checks of anarchy liberty will not perish. He remembers with a thrill the anniversary of American Independence as that day comes. Of his own declaration of the rights of man, he says that if he were alone in the universe he would not hesitate to maintain it. He scorns the idea of retracting it at the expense of his character and principles. But never, never did any soul rise to purer heights than when from that dungeon he left us this prison legacy, "that the satisfaction derived from a single act rendered to humanity, more than outweighs all the evil inflicted by our enemies, and even all the ingratitude of the country." Then, going further, he sends his thoughts to those poor African slaves on the distant plantation of Cayenne. In the wreck of his great fortune, he knew not what had become of this plantation, and he "trusts that his wife will take care that the Africans who cultivate it do not lose their liberty." Search history, and I know nothing more sublimely touching than these simple words from that heavy-bolted dungeon. That noble woman, mated with him

in soul, as in the marriage vow—and in all history there are few women that can compare with the wife of La Fayette—knowing well his wishes, had already sought to anticipate them. But, alas! in vain. The liberty of those Africans had already been cruelly confiscated with his estate, and that confiscation was but symbolical of the proscription that now descended upon his family and his friends.

In the masquerade of blood which now ensued, the imputation of "Fayetteism" was equivalent to a decree of death; nor were tender women spared. The sister, mother, and grandmother of his wife all perished in the same hour upon the scaffold, and fell with a hundred others in a promiscuous grave. His own wife was twice plunged in a dungeon, and only escaped the same fate by the timely overthrow of the tyrant Robespierre. Their only son, George Washington La Fayette, had already, by her maternal care, been conveyed to his great namesake in America, who received and sheltered him at Mount Vernon. At last, regaining her freedom, this noble woman, with her two youthful daughters, under the protection of an American passport, hurried across the continent of Europe to Vienna, and threw herself at the feet of the Emperor. To her prayers for the release of her husband, the despot replies that his hands are tied; but touched by devotion so womanly, so wife-like, so heroic, he yields so far as to allow her, with her two daughters, to share his wretched captivity, upon the single condition that upon once entering the dungeon they were never more to come out; and these terms were accepted by that devoted family. Vain now were all the efforts for his liberation. Not Fox, not Cornwallis, not Washington, could open those prison doors. La Fayette was declared to be not only the representative of the French Revolution, but of universal liberty, whose existence was dangerous to European governments. Private enterprise seemed for a moment to be likely to end his long confinement.

Upon the repeated application of his physician, La Fayette was allowed occasional exercise in the open air, under a strict military escort. Two friends, who for several months had been watching for the opportunity, communicated to him their plans, and, with their assistance, after a desperate conflict, he escaped, but only to be recaptured, after a flight of twenty-seven miles, and plunged into a still worse dungeon. But this enterprise, although unsuccessful, is never heard without a thrill of gratitude toward those noble men who, taking their lives in their hands, thus braved the

Austrian tyranny. Human nature seems more fair from their example. All hope for his liberation was now abandoned. His friends, both in France and in America, were wrung with anguish; and Washington, at his fireside in Mount Vernon, shed tears for his friend. But an intervention was at hand which would not be denied. It was the sword of Napoleon Bonaparte, which, flashing across the Alps from his Italian campaigns, broke open the dungeon of Olmutz. The conqueror was afterward heard to declare, that among all the concessions he extorted, there was nothing he found it so difficult to obtain as that release. But it was accomplished, and La Fayette, with his wife and daughters, leaving their dungeon-home, traversed Europe to Hamburg, where they found shelter with the American Consul beneath the American flag. This was in the autumn of 1797.

And now, while still in exile from France, he opens a new career of glory by entering the lists against the African slave-trade; and in memorable words he announces that it is the mission of France, while healing the wounds of the past, to provide freedom for all, whether black or white, beneath the protection of law. It was at this time that he said if he could only find himself the possessor of a few dollars—for his fortune was all gone—he had conceived the plan of buying a farm either in Virginia, not far from what he calls the Federal City, or in New England, not far from Boston; and thus, in one of his tender letters to his wife, he balances between these two places: "I can not disguise from you, my dear Adrienne, that I can ill bear the serfs where I now am, and it is mournful to every friend of Virginia to find in Virginia negro slaves; for equality, which in the Northern States is for everybody, exists in the Southern States for the whites only. Therefore, while I perceive all the reasons which should draw us near Mount Vernon and the City of the Federal Union, yet I should prefer New England."

At length, rejoining France, when the outlawry against him had become a dead letter under Napoleon, he withdrew to La Grange, where he preserved unsullied the integrity of his character. Napoleon wished to make him Senator, and he declined; offered him the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, which he also declined. But never did his firmness show itself more conspicuously than when, upon the proposition to make Napoleon Consul for life, he openly recorded his vote, "No," adding that he could not vote for such a magistracy until liberty was further guaranteed. Napoleon

plunged still further into his career, but never for one moment did La Fayette despair; and when Washington, in 1804, tendered him the post of Governor of Louisiana, he declined, because he was unwilling to take a step which should seem to separate him from the destinies of his own country, which he still hoped to see settle down upon the adamant foundation of universal liberty. He was tranquil now through all—through splendor of the empire, through marvelous successes and marvelous disasters, at the victories of Austerlitz, at the retreat from Moscow, at the capitulation of Paris. As little could he participate in the restoration of Louis as in the usurpation of Napoleon. But he reappeared when Napoleon returned from Elba—he came forward as a simple Deputy. The disaster of Waterloo now fell upon France. The Emperor insisted upon the dissolution of the Chamber, and upon the Dictatorship. Then, with a voice that had been silent for more than a generation, did La Fayette submit the proposition, which was at once adopted, declaring the Chamber permanent, and any attempt by the Emperor to dissolve it to be treason. The restoration of the Bourbons lasted from 1815 to 1820, during much of which time La Fayette, as a simple Deputy, sat in the Chamber without constraint. At the news of his election, Louis XVIII. trembled.

Overtopping all others in character, La Fayette was conspicuous also in debate. Especially was he aroused whenever human liberty was in question; nor did he hesitate to vindicate the great revolution in France, at once, in its principles and in its practical results, boldly declaring that its evils were to be referred, not so much to the bad passions of men, as to those timid counsels which instituted compromise for principle.

His parliamentary career was interrupted by an episode which belongs to the poetry of history—his visit to the United States upon the invitation of the American Congress. The Boston poet at that time gave expression to the universal feeling when he said:

We bow not the neck, we bend not the knee,
But our hearts, La Fayette, we surrender to thee.

As there never was such a guest, so there never was such a host; and yet, throughout all this transcendent hospitality, binding him by new ties, he kept the loyalty of his heart—he did not forget the African slave. But his country had still further need of his services. Charles X. undertook to subvert the charter under which he held his crown, and Paris was again aroused, and

France was heaving again. Then did all eyes turn to the patriot farmer of Lagrange—to the hero already of two revolutions—to inspire confidence alike by his bravery and by his principles. Now seventy-three years of age, with a few friends, among whom was a personal friend of my own—whom some of you also know, Dr. Howe, of Boston—he passed through the streets, where the conflict was hotly raging, and across the barricades to the City Hall, when he was again placed at the head of the National Guard of France. "Liberty shall triumph," said he in his first proclamation, "or we will all perish together." Charles X. fell before those words of that old man. The destinies of France were again in his hand. He might have made himself Dictator; he might have established a republic of which he might have been chief; but mindful of that moderation which was the rule of his life, unwilling to hazard again the civil conflict which had drenched France with fraternal blood, he proposed a popular throne surrounded by popular institutions. The Duke of Orleans, as Louis Philippe, became King of France. Unquestionably his own desire was for a republic, upon the American model; but he gave up this darling desire of his heart, satisfied that, at least, liberty was secured. If this were not so, it was because for a moment he had put his trust in princes. He again withdrew to his farm; but his heart was wherever liberty was in question—now with the Pole, now with the Italian, now with the African slave. For the rights of the latter he had unflinching sympathy, beginning with his youth, and upon the principle, as he expresses it, "every slave has the right of immediate emancipation, by the concession of his master or by force, and this principle no man can call in question." Tenderly he approached this great question of our own country, but the constancy with which he did it shows that it haunted and perplexed him like a sphynx with a perpetual riddle. He could not understand how men who had fought for their own liberty could deny liberty to others. But he did not despair; although at one time in his old age his impatient philanthropy broke forth in the declaration, that he never would have drawn the sword for America had he known that it was to found a government that sanctioned human slavery.

The time was now at hand when his great career was to close. Being taken ill, at first with a cold, the Chamber of Deputies inquired of his son after his health; and upon the next day, May 20, 1834, he died, at the age of seventy-seven. The ruling passion

was strong to the last. As at the beginning, so at the end, he was all for freedom; and the last lines traced by his hand, which he rose from his death-bed to write, attest his joy at that great act of emancipation by which England, at an expense of a hundred million dollars, had given freedom to eight hundred thousand slaves. "Nobly," he writes—and these were the last words of your benefactor—"nobly has the public treasure been employed." And those last words, speaking from the tomb, still sound in our ears. Such was La Fayette. At the tidings of his death there was mourning in two hemispheres, and the saying of Pericles was again fulfilled, for the whole earth was the sepulcher of the illustrious man.

"Not to those chambers where the mighty rest
Since their foundation, came a nobler guest;
Nor e'er was to the bowers of bliss conveyed
A purer spirit or a fairer shade."

Judge him by what he did throughout a long life, and you must confess his greatness. Judge him by the principles of his life, and you must bend with reverence before him. In all history he stands alone. There is no one who has done so much for human freedom. In youth, showing the firmness of age, and in age, showing the ardor of youth; trampling upon the prejudices of birth, upon the seductions of power, upon the blandishments of wealth, setting aside the favor even of that people whom he loved so well; whether placed at the height of worldly ambition, or plunged in the vaults of a dungeon, always true to the same principles. Great he was, indeed; not as an author, although he has written what we are all glad to read; not as an orator, although he has spoken often and well; not as a soldier, although always brave and often working miracles of genius; not as a statesman, although versed in government and intuitively perceiving the relations of men and nations; not on these accounts is he great; but he is great as one of the world's benefactors, who possessed the largest measure of that greatest gift of God to man—the genius of beneficence. And great he is as an example, which, so long as history endures, shall teach all—the author, the orator, the soldier, the statesman—all alike to labor, and if need be, to suffer for human rights. The fame of such a character brightening with the advance of civilization, can find no limit except in earthly gratitude.

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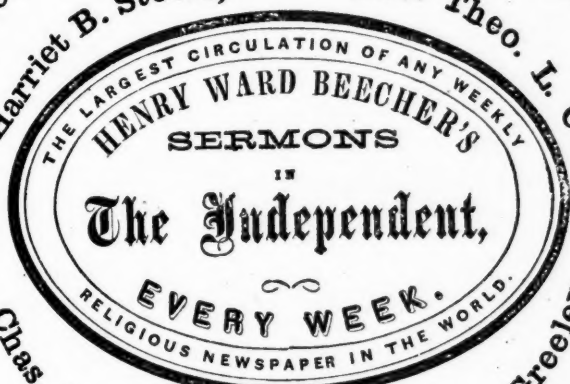
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